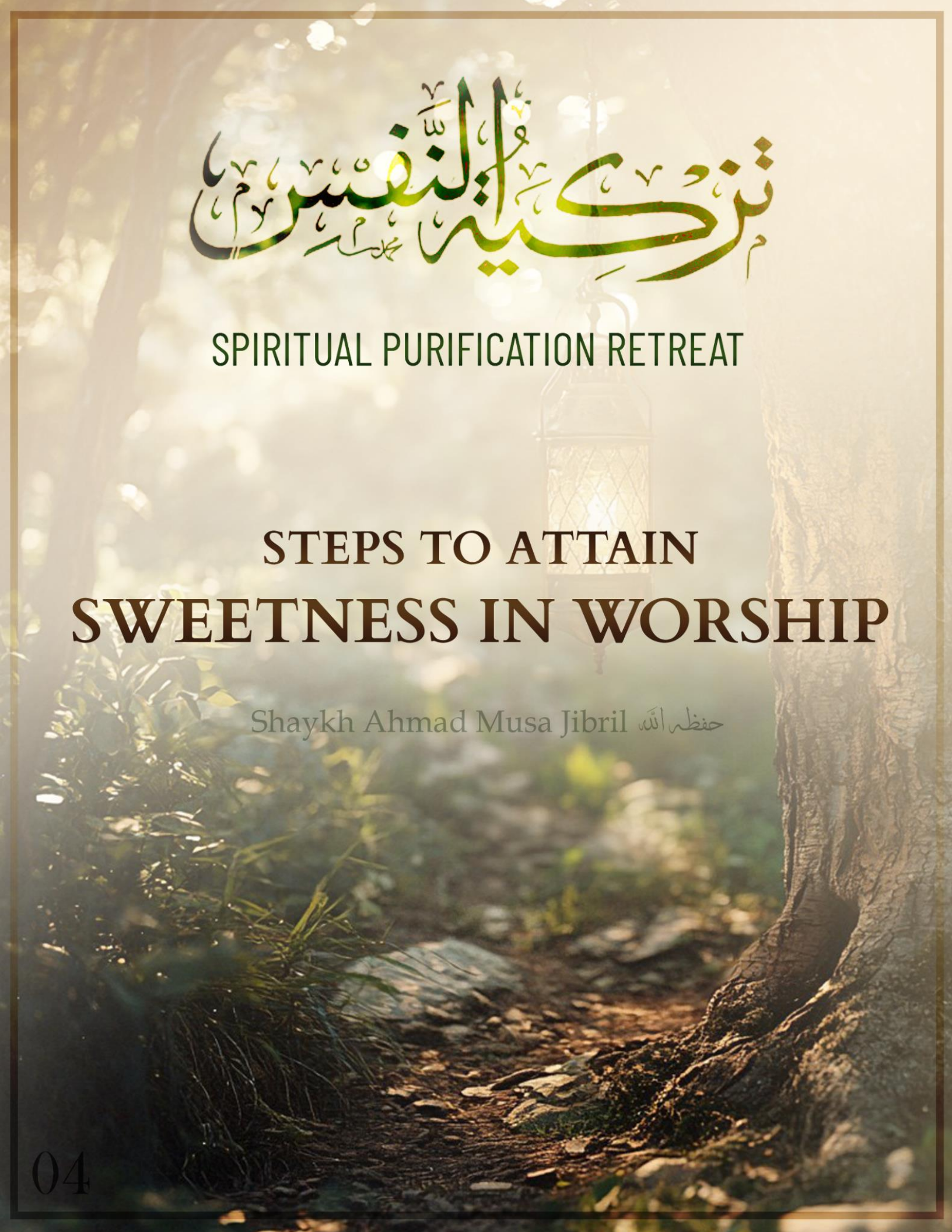

SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION RETREAT

STEPS TO ATTAIN
SWEETNESS IN WORSHIP

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Spiritual Purification Retreat | Ramadan 1446

Steps to Attain Sweetness in Worship

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Now we can talk about how to attain sweetness in ‘Ibādah. The first step is to steer clear of the opposite, which means staying away from sins. Sins act as a wall that prevents you from experiencing the true joy of ‘Ibādah. The greater the sins are, whether they’re major or minor sins, the further away you are from savoring the sweetness of ‘Ibādāt. Wuhayb Ibn Al-Ward Al-Makki was a Tābi’ī, and he was asked, *“Can someone who’s sinning experience the sweetness of ‘Ibādah?”* He said, *“No, merely thinking about sinning will cost one the sweetness in his ‘Ibādah.”* Keep in mind, sweetness in your ‘Ibādah is something you should experience in this Dunyā.

إِنَّ ٱلْأَبْرَارَ لَفِى نَعِيمٍ

Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure…

Allāh سبحانه وتعالى said the pious, the righteous, will be in joy and in delight. That’s not limited to the Ākhirah. Ibn Al-Qayyim رحمه الله said, *“Don’t think*

إِنَّ ٱلْأَبْرَارَ لَفِى نَعِيمٍ

Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure…

وَإِنَّ ٱلْفُجَّارَ لَفِى جَحِيمٍ

And indeed, the wicked will be in Hellfire.

only applies to the afterlife." Meaning, that joy is not only the joy and delight of the Ākhirah. He said, *"نعيم here refers to the feeling of joy that occurs in all three phases of existence."* He means by that that the righteous will enjoy sweetness in this Dunyā, the first phase, and in the second phase in the barzakh, the intermediate stage in the grave, and in the Afterlife. You need to feel that sweetness in this Dunyā, and that only comes through 'Ibādah.

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله تعالى stated something very essential about this, and I'm referring to the meaning rather than the direct word for word translation, as I'm not using any notes and I haven't reviewed it in some time. He said, رحمه الله تعالى, if you don't feel sweetness or joy in your heart when you perform 'Ibādāt, then you're doing something wrong. Why? Because he said Allāh سبحانه وتعالى is Ash-Shakūr. Ash-Shakūr means He's the most appreciative. That means He rewards those who perform 'Ibādāt with a sense of sweetness in their hearts, and He grants them peace of mind in this Dunyā, because he is Ash-Shakūr, and that's aside from what they get in the Ākhirah. So if you don't feel that way, then something about your 'Ibādah isn't right. It needs improvements. What one should look into, if they're not feeling this, is the effect of sins on taking away the blessing of sweetness in 'Ibādah. A poet, and it's supposedly attributed to 'Ali Ibn Abi Tālib رضي الله عنه, he said,

إذا كُنتَ في نِعمَةٍ فَارعَها, فَإِنَّ المَعاصي تُزيلُ النِعَم

If you find yourself in a state of blessing, cherish it, because sins erase those blessings.

وَحافِظ عَلَيها بِتَقوى الإِلَهِ, فَإِنَّ الإِلَهَ سَريعُ النِّقَم

Protect your Ni'mah and blessing through obedience to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى, because He's swift in His rettrubution.

As a believer in Tawhid, among the biggest Ni'am of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى on this earth is finding sweetness in your 'Ibādah. That's a Ni'mah that many people fail to recognize as such. When you talk to a lot of people they often say things like, *"I don't want to sin, because I'm making Du'ā for a promotion, and I don't want Allāh* سبحانه وتعالى *to turn me down."* I don't want to sin because I don't want to face financial problems, or issues in my marriage, or so Allāh سبحانه وتعالى can grant me a righteous spouse. Their focus tends to be more on worldly concerns when it comes to the consequences of sins, but the consequences of sins aren't just limited to the physical, visible troubles that you face in your health and in your finances. There's something even more subtle and more impactful. It's when light of Īmān fades from the heart, and then it causes one to lose the sweetness of 'Ibādah. That's truly among the gravest and greatest punishments of sins. The sweetness of 'Ibādah is among the greatest blessings that Allāh سبحانه وتعالى bestows upon a believer. Strive to experience this joy, and when you reach that status, hold on to that mighty blessing tightly. Ibn Al-Jawzi attributed to Ahbār Bani Isrā'īl, a scholar or scholars of Bani Isrā'īl, that one or some of them said, *"O Lord! Ya Allāh! How many times do I disobey you without tasting any punishment!"* And it was replied to them, *"How many times were you punished without you even realizing it!"* He was told, *"Haven't you been deprived of sweetness in your 'Ibādah?"* That's something overlooked by many. The price of glancing at Harām or casually saying a few words of Harām can lead to losing the sweetness in one's 'Ibādah. Sins take out the blessing of the sweetness of 'Ibādah and wipe it out. The Salaf had a different perspective than we do. They believe that one of the worst consequences of sinning was losing out on the sweetness of 'Ibādah. Imagine this: It's Maghrib during Ramadān and you're super hungry, and a mouth-watering meal is placed right in front of you, but when you take a bite it has no flavor to it. That's what it feels like to do 'Ibādāt without any sweetness.

To help you avoid sins, remember how ugly it is to sin, and always remember the negative consequences that they bring. One who sins and is persistent in his sins trades the sweetness and security and comfort that comes

along with ‘Ibādah for the discomfort of sins and the fear and harm that come along with sin. Which sane person exchanges comfort, security, and sweetness for fear and harm? You won’t experience the sweetness of ‘Ibādah until you create a barrier between yourself and sins. Yahyā Ibn Mu’ādh said, *“The heart cannot experience the sweetness of ‘Ibādah when it’s burdened with sins.”* Sins eradicate the sweetness of ‘Ibādah. This entire point and its solution can be summarized by a statement from Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله تعالى. Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said, *“If a person feels like their heart isn’t enjoying the sweetness of ‘Ibādah, they should concentrate on repenting and asking Allāh* سبحانه وتعالى *for forgiveness.”*

Also, to experience the true sweetness of ‘Ibādah, it’s important to engage in many, various, additional acts of ‘Ibādah. You can switch the ‘Ibādāt up with various types of ‘Ibādāt to keep ‘Ibādah interesting so you stay motivated and engaged. Sometimes, for example, you focus on Salāh. Other times you’re focused on fasting, giving charity, making Du'ā, seeking knowledge, spreading Da’wah, teaching others to recite the Qur’ān, and reciting the Qur’ān. The more you do of these acts, the more you’ll feel the Love of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and the sweetness of the ‘Ibādah, by proof from the Hadīth Al-Qudsi,

وَلَا يَزَالُ عَبْدِي يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ بِالنَّوَافِلِ حَتَّى أُحِبَّهُ، فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ كُنْت سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ

“My servant continues to draw near to me with Nawāfil until I love him.” What happens when Allāh loves you? *“I’m his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hands with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks.”* Furthermore, *“When he asks Me, I will surely give it to him, and when he seeks refuge with Me, I will grant him refuge.”* If you seek nearness to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى through Nawāfil, Allāh سبحانه وتعالى says, حَتَّى أُحِبَّه. He will love you.

When Allāh loves you, He will bring you near to Him. When you are near to Him, you will most definitely taste the ultimate sweetness in your ‘Ibādah.

Another point is, while you do any of the ‘Ibādāt, it’s essential to consistently reflect upon and renew your Niyyah, in order to feel their sweetness. Failing to engage with the essence of ‘Ibādah may result in the ‘Ibādah becoming a mere habitual practice. An ‘Ibādah like Salāh involves words and actions, and it also has a deeper spiritual essence. Some perform Salāh by reciting the memorized words and phrases as well as performing the associated movements without genuinely contemplating the significance of their words or reflecting on the essence of the ‘Ibādah itself. When this occurs, ‘Ibādāt like Salāh won’t really impact that individual. They'll exit their Salāh and Siyām in the same state that they entered. Why? ‘Ibādāt are done many times a day. Some are done ten or hundreds of times a day, and it’s common for them to devolve into mere routines if the intention is not refreshed. When this occurs, the sweetness and joy and spiritual fulfillment derived from these ‘Ibādāt will be lost. Don’t turn your ‘Ibādāt into routines and habits, rather turn your habits into ‘Ibādāt with the right Niyyah. Many habits turn into an act of ‘Ibādah just by having the right Niyyah. Don’t let the opposite happen. And while you do all this that we talk about, be mindful of Du'ā. Ask Allāh سبحانه وتعالى to bless you with joy in your ‘Ibādah. A believer is powerless in this matter and in everything else, unless Allāh سبحانه وتعالى grants him strength. Also, in order to taste the sweetness of ‘Ibādah, you need to make the purpose of your existence on this earth your number one concern. ‘Ibādah must be your number one concern on this earth.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ ٱلْجِنَّ وَٱلْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.

A wise individual was once asked, *"Do Dunyā distractions and thoughts ever come to you while you're in Salāh?"* And that person said, *"Is there really anything more important to think about than Salāh?"* There's no matter greater than Salāh, therefore how can one contemplate on anything else while he's in Salāh? Your worries are as big as your concerns. Focus on making 'Ibādah your top priority and your top concern, and you'll attain sweetness in 'Ibādah. If you have a hobby that you really enjoy and you make it your top concern, and then there's a chance to participate and get involved in that hobby, you'll be very excited and very happy to take part in it, especially when you're thinking about the rewards and medals you may earn. By making 'Ibādah your concern, you will find joy in it in this Dunyā, while at the same time accumulating Ajr with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى.

To make 'Ibādah your greatest concern, you need proper Tawakkul on Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Tawakkul on Allāh سبحانه وتعالى has a strong connection with attaining sweetness in 'Ibādah. When one places their trust in Allāh سبحانه وتعالى regarding their sustenance, their marriage, their children, and their employment, then these matters will diminish in their level of concern, because they entrusted them to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. That will then elevate the priority of 'Ibādah as their foremost concern. True Tawakkul on Allāh will make Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and worshipping him your biggest concern. You will then find relief from the worries and concerns that you entrusted Allāh سبحانه وتعالى with.

When you perform 'Ibādāt, clear your mind of all worldly distractions. When it's time for Salāh, or you want to recite Qur'ān, set aside your worries and concentrate fully on this sacred moment of 'Ibādah. This may prove challenging in the beginning, but with practice, it becomes achievable over time. You need to prepare for an 'Ibādah to see its sweetness. For example, attaining Khushū' and sweetness in Salāh starts way before Salāh, even before Adhān. It starts in Wudū', if not before. Start your internal preparation for Salāh with Wudū', and focus on Wudū' and Khushū' in Wudū'. Some get surprised when you tell them there's Khushū' in Wudū'. When you think about Wudū' and you realize that while you're washing your face in Wudū', it's not only your physical face you're clearing. It's all the sins you see with your eyes being cleansed. Similarly, when you wash your

hands, all the wrong things you've done with them are being wiped away. The same goes for your feet, as mentioned in the Hadīth that's in Sahīh Muslim. If you truly understand this and you avoid treating Wudū' as just a physical act, as most do, you experience a deep sense of humility and sweetness in Wudū', and that will be carried on to the Salāh. When you contemplate that, that Hadīth in Sahīh Muslim — and there are many more — you'll realize that the water you're washing your physical parts with is in reality brightness you're rinsing your heart out with. Then you can understand why many of the Salaf always renewed their Wudū even when they were sure they were on Wudū'. They sought to add brightness on top of brightness, enjoying the sweetness they never got enough of. After Wudū', take some time out to do Istighfār, recite the Qur'ān, listen to the Adhān with concentration and repeat after the Mu'adhin. Just like what I said about Wudū', many get surprised to know that listening to Adhān should be like how you listen to the Qur'ān. Ibn Jurayj related in Musannaf 'Abd Ar-Razzāq that some of the Salaf used to listen to the Adhān in the same manner that they listened to the Qur'ān. They listened attentively in Khushū' and contemplation. Repeating after the Mu'adhin and making Du'ā between the Adhān and the 'Iqāmah is essential in preparing yourself for the Salāh. Making Tawbah and Istighfar so you can stand before Allāh سبحانه وتعالى with a clean state — doing all this before the Salāh will attain one sweetness in those 'Ibādah and then in Salāh itself. Someone who takes five minutes out for Salāh will not feel the same as one who prepares himself in the way that I mentioned.

Whatever you do, keep pushing yourself forward in an attempt to create and maintain a feeling of joy in your 'Ibādah. If you don't feel the sweetness in Salāt Adh-Dhuhr, try in Salāt Al-'Asr, if not, try in Salāt Al-Maghrib. Aim to reach the sweetness of 'Ibādah of Ramadān in the beginning, if you can't, in the middle. If that doesn't work, in the last ten days. If not, in the six days of Shawwāl or the many Nawāfil that follow, or in next Ramadān Inshā'Allāh. Continuously strive to experience the sweetness in 'Ibādah and remain persistent in your efforts. That's a form of Jihād An-Nafs. Some in the past said, *"My Nafs was in resistance to the 'Ibādāt. Ultimately I triumphed in guiding my Nafs to Allāh* سبحانه وتعالى *and my Nafs began to rejoice at 'Ibādāt."* Keep working hard to experience the joy of

‘Ibādah through these methods. It takes effort and sacrifice, but your effort will not go in vain, and it will not last forever, because when Allāh سبحانه وتعالى sees the servant striving with sincerity, He will help them achieve the level of Īmān that they seek. He will reward them for their hard work with sweetness in ‘Ibādah that surpasses any pain that they endured while they were trying to attain it. We’ll stop here.

وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم